



File Code: 1950
Date: July 19, 2021

Dear Stakeholder:

You are receiving this letter because you requested to be notified of activities on U.S. Forest Service land or because you may own property immediately adjacent to National Forest lands where this activity is being proposed.

The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests is proposing to implement a Forest Order to limit the number of days camping is permitted on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, pursuant to 16 USC 551 and 36 CFR 261.50(a) and (b). This Order will provide for public safety and the protection of natural resources by prohibiting long term occupancy of National Forest System lands within the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.

Background

The current closure orders dealing with the 14-day stay limit on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests includes, CO-17-03 (Developed Recreation Areas) and CO-13-36 (General Forest Orders), and states "...establishing, maintaining, or using a developed campsite/dispersed campsite shall be limited to a period not to exceed 14 consecutive days. Upon vacating a site, all personal property will be removed. A new campsite may not be re-established within 1 mile of the vacated campsite for a period of 7 days. 36 CFR 261.58(a)."

Under these current Forest Orders, some visitors extend their stay on the national forest by relocating to a nearby area, only to rotate and return to prior occupied sites, in effect becoming semi-permanent occupants on public national forest system lands.

More than ever, people are seeking safe and healthy outdoor activities. The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests is experiencing record visitation levels as it serves as a premier destination for more than 3 million people every year.

Increased public use of the national forest includes people seeking dispersed camping locations that do not provide restrooms, trash services or drinking water found at developed campgrounds. Overuse of dispersed camping locations often results in impacts to the landscape from litter, human waste, and soil erosion into waterways. These areas also experience an increased level of illicit activities that threaten public safety and interfere with the enjoyment of these public lands by all visitors.

Purpose and Need

The purpose and need for this Order will provide for public safety and the protection of natural resources by prohibiting long term occupancy of National Forest System lands within the



Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.

Prohibiting camping in excess of 14 days within any 30-day time period will ensure that campsites are vacated and available at least every 14 days, to provide for use and enjoyment by as many members of the public as possible.

This Order will ensure that natural resources are protected. Areas that are occupied for extended periods of time have experienced excessive soil compaction, erosion, and removal of vegetation and ground cover within riparian zones, which adversely impacts water quality and streams that serve as critical habitat for numerous sensitive or endangered wildlife and plant species.

Proposed Action

The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests proposes to implement a three-year general order that will read as follows.

Pursuant to 36 CFR 261.50(a) and (b), the following acts are prohibited within the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests (CONF).

Camping or maintaining a campsite in developed and dispersed areas in excess of 14 days within any 30-day time period. After the camper has accumulated 14 days within any 30-day time period, the camper must leave that area/campground and move from CONF land before returning for another stay. (36 CFR 261.58(a))

Pursuant to 36 CFR 261.50(e), the following persons are exempt from this order:

1. Persons with a permit specifically authorizing the otherwise prohibited act or omission.
2. Any Federal, State or Local Law Enforcement Officer or member of an organized rescue or fire fighting force in the performance of an official duty.

Public Involvement

Scoping comments will be accepted for 30 days. Comments on this proposal must be received by the Supervisor's Office by **August 25, 2021**. Please send substantive comments relative to this proposal to the Responsible Official for this project:

Mr. Edward Hunter, Jr., Forest Supervisor
 1755 Cleveland Hwy
 Gainesville, GA 30501
 phone: (770)297-3000; fax: (770)297-3011

Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, pdf, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc or .docx) to SM.FS.chattoconee@usda.gov.

Please make your comments as specific to the proposal as possible. Include the following information:

1. Your name, address, and (if possible) telephone number.
2. Title of the document on which comment is being submitted (Forest Order Camping Restrictions).
3. Specific facts or comments along with supporting reasons that the person believes the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision.

Additional information regarding this action can be obtained from: Mr. Nick Baggett, Natural Resource Manager, Nicholas.Baggett@usda.gov.

Thank you for your interest in the management of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest.

Sincerely,

X  _____

Signed by: EDWARD HUNTER
EDWARD HUNTER, JR
Forest Supervisor

cc: Nelson González-Süllow, Nicholas Baggett, Weldon Young